

Seeing Crusading

In Kenneth Doren's new installation *Crusading*, the viewer is confronted by a 4'x4' newspaper image encased in glass and suspended from the ceiling. The news caption below the close up image of an old man reads, "Dr. Luigi Bella, the controversial Italian doctor who claims he has the miracle cure for cancer, defended his treatment in Toronto on Monday." The exceptional thing about the photo is that wires encased in surgical tubing penetrate the doctor's eyes, ears and mouth before they wind out to their connection with an amplifier, speakers and an old television set also suspended in space in front of the doctor's image.

The tape that plays on the video screen are the quiet and deliberately paced takes of an eight year old girl haltingly singing from a sheet of quotes made by Dr. Luigi Di Bella in a crusade for his unorthodox treatments for cancer. As her small voice sings out the doctor's defense of his alternative position the viewer is engaged by the strangeness of this quiet techno theatre that is not unlike the wire strewn operating theatres of contemporary hospital settings.

Dr. Di Bella's story is significant of the shift we may be seeing now in the public's response to alternatives that rival traditionally held positions on highly emotional issues. The hope that drives the public interest in this story is what Kenneth has chosen to explore in this work. The power of public sentiment surrounding this story seems to have given the media license to exploit the issue on a global level, that is actually effecting change within the medical profession.

In this installation the television holds a central place of authority suspended in the midst of tubes and amplifiers that appear to feed the story it tells. The subdued mystery of this odd construction is reflective of much of Kenneth Doren's contemporary art making. Magical and manipulative qualities of mediation seduce his audiences in the form of opera, videos, musical compositions, drawings and photos that he has reconstructed. Although he notes that his work is often described as dark, it is probably the mystery that surrounds the deconstruction or manipulation of a familiar form that intrigues him and informs work like *Crusading*. It is a process of investigation that Kenneth embarks upon when he "takes things apart", in order to see an idea or an art form in a new way. In the case of *Crusading* his manipulations of familiar news media devices subtly leave his audience reconsidering how we "read the news" and possibly recognizing the preconceived notions we bring to such readings.

The microphone sitting in front of the young singer in Kenneth's video appears to reference the anchor person on television news shows who is set up to give a seamless account of the story at hand delivered with total comprehension and concern no matter how dislocated he is from what he is actually reading. The impediment or difficulty we experience when we are watching this video is the gap we feel between what we are conditioned to expect of a child, of an operatic song, or of a TV broadcast and what we actually get. The delivery of "the news" is not seamless, and polished, it is read by a child who obviously does not understand what she has been given to read, nor does she feel any need to disguise her disinterest and boredom. The resulting sequences are humorous and poignant as we contrast the innocent honesty of a child with the highly manipulated but supposedly objective deliverance of "the anchor man."

Despite the controversial content of the subject Kenneth has chosen for this installation he is not pedantic. He is not interested in particular theory or doctrine here or in his other works. He works to take an overview, a new view or way of seeing that might unravel the formal rules, and reveal something beyond a literal meaning. Kenneth's closely cropped images of the young singer create an intensely intimate view of her reading. He has often used children in his work as "collaborators" because he enjoys, "the power of their expression" and the contrast of "their honesty and their precise way of thinking", with our lack of respect for them as makers of meaning. Although Kenneth is not interested in being didactic in his work he does strive to create a "rub" or discrepancy between our preconceived notions of how information should be mediated and the recognition of an insidious cultural disrespect for particular voices.

There is an obvious generosity that Kenneth shares with the subjects of his work. These mainly include children, handicapped people and animals. They appear in all phases of the creation of his videos, operas, and musical compositions. As we see here in *Crusading*, the people his media manipulates still emerge as subjects themselves due to his open approach to their own artistry. The resulting humor and intimacy in his work evolves out of his willingness to let the actor, singer, or writer take charge of the story or song in their own voice. He sees himself as an editor who enjoys watching the creation of new art forms by the subjects he employs in his works. Although his viewers may sense that there is something incongruent or out of place in his re-constructions, what he allows us to experience is an understanding or recognition of the authority we unquestioningly give to the media.

Crusading is an opportunity to watch how this innovative young artist unravels the making of a media issue, or the prescribed use of video, song, voice and music to playfully recreate them as vehicles to send new voices, new poetry and possibly new ways of seeing to his viewers.

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